

DEVELOPMENTS IN TEACHING APPROACHES: "A NOVEL APPROACH TO LEARNING REINFORCEMENT"

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ABSTRACT

The first part of this paper describes a novel approach to learning reinforcement that has been developed as part of the learning and teaching strategy of the undergraduate Product Design Programme at the University of Wales Institute Cardiff (UWIC). This new approach is based around a new analytical method known as *Reverse Marketing Analysis* (RMA). The main focus of this new approach is the clarification of understanding of the activity of target marketing within a Level-1 Marketing module.

Market research has shown that personas and lifestyles can be identified to describe the typical average end user of a product. However, the conventional study of existing products does not normally provide the learners an opportunity to clarify and demonstrate their understanding of the theory behind the identification of target markets. In contrast, the implementation of RMA facilitates the clarification and reinforcement of the role of the target marketing that led to the development of a product.

The initial experimental implementation of this new learning method has been conducted and has yielded encouraging results and the second part of the paper presents a case study of the implementation of RMA within the Product Design programme at UWIC.

Keywords: *Learning and teaching, Curricula, marketing, design methodology, reinforcement, learning method, Product Design, target market.*

INTRODUCTION

Introductory Product Design projects have highlighted the problem concerning the clarification and understanding of a target market when studying at Level-1 on a Product Design programme at Higher Education. Experience has shown that undergraduates initially find it difficult to appreciate that product designer's intended target market is wider than themselves, friends and their families! Learners must appreciate "*The essence of marketing is to identify and satisfy customer's needs [...] It is a vital requirement of good product design that the Marketing and Designer fully*

understand these needs.” [1]. Current marketing theory demonstrates that personas can be created to illustrate the lifestyle and user habits of the average end user of a product. This theory, however, is sophisticated and relies on actual data and does not give the learners an opportunity to clarify and demonstrate their understanding of identifying a target market before progressing into the realms of ethnographic research and personas. To clarify and reinforce the role of a target market during a module, Design Process and User Needs, a learning tool has been developed and implemented - RMA. On developing this tool parallels were drawn against the Reverse Engineering Analysis tool. This encouraged the development and rationale for the marketing equivalent.

MODULE DELIVERY

The marketing methods currently taught within Product Design assume that the learners appreciate the need of a target market. Experience has demonstrated that they do not appreciate this need and an initial foundation of understanding must be created before exploring need and classifications of the potential end user. Currently the theory and practise of ‘who is your target market’ is discussed in lectures and then the learners are given the opportunity to demonstrate their learning via a design project. The combination of Formative and Summative assessment [2] highlighted that learners still made design decisions based on their opinion – a common mistake for a newly training designers! Level-2 modules give the learners the opportunity to explore target market lifestyles and personas but it was evident that a Level-1 platform was needed.

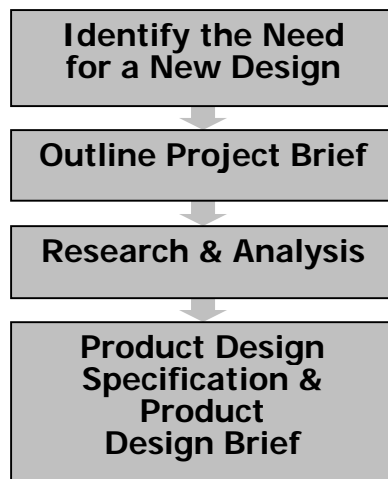


Figure 1: part of the UWIC Product Design Process

Target marketing in the Product Design process is addressed via market research based on the *“the need for specific information to enable it to make informed decisions about its product development strategy”* [3]. Identification and an understanding of the market informs design decisions. Learners need to appreciate the need for clearly identifying a market/s and then representing that market/s in the end design.

REVERSE MARKETING ANALYSIS (RMA)

A new learning method called RMA (fig 3) created at UWIC takes a different approach to conventional marketing teaching methods. The learners are given an existing product and asked to identify the target audience based on the character of the product. Unlike personas, RMA asks for the learners to portray the target market via an A1 sized caricature (fig 2). Caricatures are used because they are an illustration that does not conform to reality and over-emphasises features. The RMA exercise requires the learners to portray as many traits as possible in the one caricature and over emphasise them using semiotics. For example a pensioner with low income could be portrayed with an open purse with only pennies visible, the connotation of pennies being poor/low income. On completion of the caricature the learners are asked to research the product and identify the actual specified target market and then compare their findings. The exercise is to provoke thinking, demonstrate the role of the target market and to see if existing products are successful in targeting their market. To clarify the learners' understanding a small design brief is then handed out. The first objective is to identify the target audience and justify their reasons behind the decision. Justification is produced in the form of statistical data or legislation sourced from the internet etc.



Figure 2: Learners

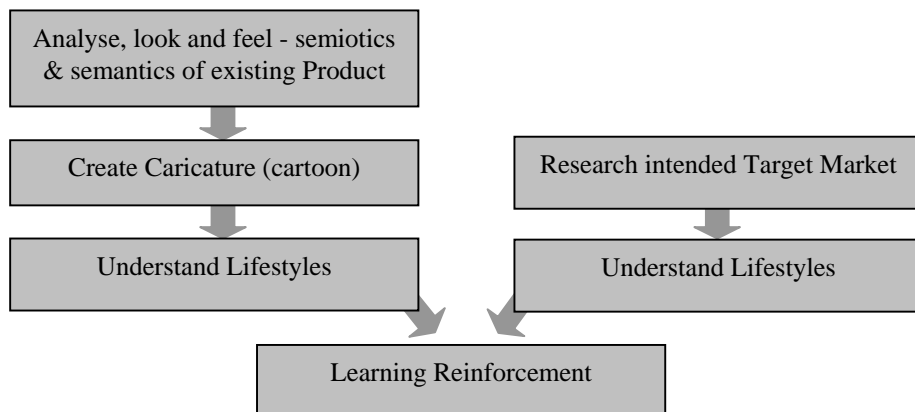


Figure 3: RMA flow diagram

EXISTING MARKETING TOOLS

RMA is closely related to existing target market identification method, i.e. personas and lifestyles, as used by Lunn & Baldwin [4] in their Monitoring consumer lifestyles of 3500 housewives. Personas [5] are created based on a combination of ethnographic research and interviews. The research then produces a behaviour pattern for that user. The purpose of defining a persona is to ensure an accurate profile of the end user and their lifestyle can be documented in detail and used as an analytical tool throughout the Product Design process. Cooper [6] describes the persona as “hypothetical archetypes, or ‘stand-ins’ for actual users”. Godwin [5] discusses the use of ‘provisional personas’, these are used when little to no research is available on the end user, but Godwin

emphasises that this method is only used as an experiment. The provisional persona has more in common with RMA as it is also created with little to no research and is used as a learning and reinforcement tool rather than a factual analytical marketing tool.

RMA is not to be confused with the existing Reverse Marketing found in industry: it is an educational tool and they both have different and definitive outcomes. Reverse Marketing concerns the “*change of perspective on purchasing and supply management.*” [7]. Reverse Marketing was published in 1988 and was recognised by Lenders and Blenkhom [8] as being important in the changing times of purchasers and suppliers and it was acknowledged that the, “buyer should participate in identifying the best solution”. [7] RMA is about identifying the end user of an existing product, and then researching the actual target market and comparing how well the company focused their marketing. The learners then reinforce their learning by identifying a target market for a design brief.

Reverse Engineering is a commonly used learning tool and could be considered analogous to RMA. Reverse Engineering [9] involves physically taking a product apart so the learners have an understanding of how the product is assembled, manufactured, structured etc. The learners use this method to enhance their knowledge of material and application. Inspiration for RMA involves the use of an existing product and the process of working backwards to clarify their understating of a target market. The learners enhance their understanding of applying the functional and aesthetical needs of a target market into a product.

REVERSE MARKETING ANALYSIS CASE STUDY

During a taught session, Level-1 learners were asked to put themselves into groups of no more than 5. Groups were used because it gave the learners the opportunity and courage to develop as individual learners in a safe environment as identified by Tuckman’s [10] group dynamics. A previous example of RMA was shared with the group so the learners were clear about the aims and objectives of the exercise and a worksheet with an existing product was handed out. Different groups were given different products to create variety and discussion. The formative assignment consisted of three tasks – all to be completed during the session by the learner groups.

Task 1: Aim: to understand the purpose of a target market.

A product targeted at a specific market was handed out to the groups (fig 4).

The learners illustrated a cross section of the target market lifestyle via a cartoon caricature (fig 2).



Figure 4: Telephone by Bang & Olufsen

Task 2: Aim: to compare the groups' caricature with the intended target market.

The learners briefly conducted research into the product's background via the internet to identify the target market.

The learners were asked to note their findings and present them to the class provoking class discussion i.e. did the caricature identify the market intended by the designers of the figure 4, how successful was it? Etc.

Task 3: Aim: put the learning into practice via a design project.

The groups were given a design brief, for example. *design a rigid backpack for a commuter.*

The first objective was to identify a target market and then find a valid quote/statistical evidence to justify why the identified target market needs the potential product. To clarify the learning, the learners were asked to produce sketches and communicate the needs of the market in the character of their product sketches.

The process of reversing the identification of a target market gave the learners the opportunity to understand how to echo the user in a product. For example, the learners were asked to identify the needs of a bag designed for an army expedition: the learners suggested durable, discreet, simple etc. The learners were then asked how they would portray these characteristics in the bag's aesthetics and function. Suggestions included giving the bag rigid sections for strength, portraying strength by designing a section that mimicked broad muscular shoulders – like the user. The caricatures gave the learners the opportunity to explore the target market's characteristics and when applied to a design brief the learners were reinforcing their learning.

During the activity the learners appeared to re-engage with the topic when producing a caricature to illustrate their findings: the group became lively, noticeably happier and the atmosphere lightened and the learners were discussing, who is a target market? Questions like this meant that the learners had started to develop the way in which they were thinking, the reasons behind certain design decisions and how they could portray their end user in their concept sketching.

CONCLUSION

Initial findings demonstrate that RMA is a useful learning reinforcement tool that helps clarify the purpose of target marketing via discussing and exploring how an existing product echoes its intended market. The main purpose of RMA is to bridge the gap between designing for yourself and designing for a market. The success of the RMA method resides in its simplicity and formative approach (fig 5). The method is intended to provoke



Figure 5: Results

thought and evaluation when addressing the identification of a market in a new design project. Reinforcing the identification of a target market using RMA differs from existing marketing strategies in that RMA is a learning tool not a factual process of identifying a market. During the application of RMA it was evident that it helped

motivate the learners in what is, potentially, a theoretical lecture environment thus maintaining their interest throughout a taught session.

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